It’s been a long day of work and I plop myself in front of my computer to relax on YouTube. When I click on a video, the first thing that comes up: an advertisement. I groan and look away. I hate ads. You probably do too. The Internet has made it possible for ads to follow us everywhere we go. The result? We are extremely annoyed when we see advertisements.

That’s why “content marketing” has become such a buzzword. In a nutshell, you create and share valuable, relevant, and consistent information to reach the audience you eventually want to sell to. The most common forms of content marketing include building a social media following and running a blog. Imagine watching a YouTube video that you WANT to watch but the video is made by a company.

I’m here to show you how you can take advantage of content marketing even as a small startup.

Picking the Content and Battlefield

As a good startup founder, you know who your target audience is and what problems they face. Get a pen and paper and make a list of all the problems that your customers or users face. Also make a list of all the things they are interested in. Your content marketing plan will focus on the things you just wrote down. Next is figuring out the right platform for you. You don’t want to spread yourself too thin. A common mistake is doing 5 platforms at once. Each platform and method requires your attention to make it done well. Choose 1 or 2 and focus on it.

You have a lot of options for where you want your content to go. Here are some of the main ones that you can try:

- **Medium**: This is particularly good for B2B companies. A lot of smart business and startup people are on Medium. You also get to tap into the existing community and won’t need to grow from scratch. You can customize your page with your branding.

- **Comma (Commaful)**: Good for targeting the college and high school age demographics. The team is very responsive and actively helps brands with content marketing if you reach out. Their creator tool also can generate beautiful videos to share on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram and make your brand look hip.

- **YouNow**: They have created a number of teen stars. If you’re good on camera and targeting 13-18 year olds, give this live streaming site a try!

- **YouTube**: If you’re energetic and good on camera, then YouTube may be for you! These are especially good for “how to’s” that require visuals. You will need a good camera or web cam.

- **Tsu**: Tsu is a social network platform similar to Facebook, but distributes part of its ad revenue with its users. There are many sub-categories to post to and most are very active, making it a good target for content.

- **Twitter**: You should use Twitter to help distribute your content regardless of if this is your main channel, but Twitter is
very diverse. Figure out what your audience likes and post things that align with their interests.

- **Anchor:** If you’re an audio kind of person, Anchor is great for making short podcasts. The audience skews towards tech and business right now and it’s very easy to share on Anchor.

- **Instagram:** Good especially if you’re targeting teenagers. Engagement is very high here but you will need to figure out how to make good photos for the content. Commaful from above may be able to help with some of the video content.

- **Your Own Blog:** You will need to figure out how to grow your traffic and worry about building the site, but you get far more control if you make your own blog.

Figure out which ones help you reach your audience best. Try some out and see what works for you. Then go all-in on the ones that work.

**Crafting Viral Content**

Once you have the strategy and platform, it’s time to brainstorm ideas for your **snackable content.** When it comes to content marketing, don’t optimize for the number of times you can plug your company. Optimize for sharing and trust. If the post looks like an advertisement, people will not read it. Many people think that optimizing for sharing means to make your share buttons bigger. Or putting the share button 5 centimeters to the right. What really drives sharing is the content.

Stephen T. Johnson works with influencers who create engaging content on a daily basis through his company **Flipmass,** a platform built for influencers’ business interactions. “Creating viral content is very similar to an experienced surfer catching a wave. You have to have a feel on the pulse of where the content is placed, how people are going to share and react to it and if that will result in a positive experience. Are you going to crash on the sand or ride out the wave and swim back out to catch the next one? Simply put: find something people are talking about, play off of it in a unique way that reflects your message and let the sharing begin,” Johnson explains.

To figure what people are already talking about, I often use **Google Trends.** You can figure out what’s being searched and get an idea of what would be a hot topic to write about. Don’t just steal the topic or regurgitate what everybody else is saying. Find something constructive to add to the conversation.

The psychology behind the story and content is also very important. If you make something boring about a hot topic, it still will not get shared. Bryan Mitchell, an entrepreneur, marketer, and programmer who has grown a Twitter network of over 16 million followers, explains, “The best way to get your audience engaged is to give them something to remember and talk about. A fail-safe way to do that is by making controversial/funny/positive/useful content. If you can get the emotionally involved you are golden. I can’t stress enough how important it is to understand your target audience. I don’t care if you have the cure for cancer, not only would a two year old not know what to do with it, they would have no interest in it.”

Seems simple enough right? Find what’s trending. Figure out how to target emotions. Then test, test, test until you get it right. Odds are you won’t at first.

**Converting Content To Results**

Now, I know what you’re thinking. I’m a businessman too. How does this lead to sales? If I don’t even plug my business, how do I make money?

Jason Wong is a Tumblr and Commaful influencer who started his own clothing company, **TrendyCo,** with content marketing strategies. He sold $20k worth of product in just 5 days with just some basic content marketing. “Content marketing consist of 50% of taking advantage of natural human behavior and 50% thinking of ways to not promote your product,” Wong explains. “Content marketing is essentially a game of trying to promote your product without trying to promote the product.”
Wong explained his method of converting content into results through a story about how pyramid scheme organizations recruit. "They mention a mentorship program for entrepreneurs. They bring you to a house party where mentors talk about ‘exciting opportunities.’ Throughout the hour-long party, the words sales, marketing, and buy are never mentioned. Just story after story about success with rich information about life and finance. Even a joke thrown in here or there. By the end, you trust them so much and change your Facebook employment status to ‘Self-Employed at Herbalife’.”

Content marketing builds trust. You may not see immediate results, but if the content gives you credibility, builds trust, and also shows the possible product benefits, it can seriously move the needle. Content builds trust and brand recognition that really pays off over time.

The recent viral Chewbacca mom video wasn’t a planned content marketing campaign, but really illustrates the power of how content marketing can work when it comes to driving purchases. If you haven’t seen the video, it’s a live stream of a mom laughing hysterically while playing with a Chewbacca mask she bought from Kohl’s. The video was shared over 3 million times and the mask was sold out everywhere within a day.

On the B2B side, Mattermark, a company that uses business data to help companies identify leads and more, runs a very successful blog and newsletter. Their blog leverages the data they have to give unique insight about the startup world. It keeps Mattermark top of mind and provides value to people who have never heard of Mattermark before.

The content in all of these examples are fun or valuable. Nobody thinks the content is an advertisement. It’s just another piece of content to consume on the Internet. That’s what makes content marketing so powerful.

Whether it’s on YouTube, Commaful, or your own blog, content marketing can really move your business forward. The return on content will only go up in the coming years so join the movement. What content are you going to create?

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